

# IMPACT

Matanuska Experiment Farm and  
Extension Center

## Pandemic leads to new methods of delivering food donations, nutrition guidance in Mat-Su

### Issue

The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that one in seven Alaskans struggles with hunger and food security issues. During the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment rates increased, putting a greater strain on food resources throughout the state, including the Mat-Su area. The Alaska Tilth Program provides produce from local farms to people in need and the Cooperative Extension Service supplies nutrition information. Methods of distributing food and nutritional education needed to change due to the pandemic.

### Response

Nutrition educator Adair Harman is based out of the Matanuska Experiment Farm and Extension Center. She works to connect the Alaska Tilth Program with community partners who reach those in need. Alaska Tilth's mission is to "build food security in Alaska by growing food, growing farmers, and feeding those in need." This year, Harman organized the produce into donations and worked with four organizations – Kids Kupboard, Mat-Su Food Bank, Palmer Food Bank and the Wasilla WIC Office, to distribute them. Kids Kupboard served food at 31 locations, helping expand the reach of the program.

In a typical year, organizations receive a bulk amount of produce, and Harman hosts cooking demonstrations to educate people about cooking fresh local produce. Due to COVID-19, these methods changed so the mission could still be achieved. Adaptations included providing flyers with recipes and fun activities to kids who received Kids Kupboard meals. Food banks were given resources such as "recipes in a bag" that included cooking tips, tricks and preservation ideas.



Produce is bagged and donated, along with nutrition information and recipes, to the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program and Mat-Su food banks.

### Results

Nine different farms and the Matanuska Experiment Farm's vegetable variety trials program contributed to the Tilth Program this year, and 39 vegetable varieties were donated, totaling 10,632 pounds of produce, a 5,067-pound increase from 2019. This year, Alaska Tilth handed out over 1,900 recipe bags, and the produce was used in 100,000 Kids Kupboard meals. The Tilth program not only helps supply food for people in need, but it also helps support local farmers, making our food system more reliable.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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